



Divorce and Separation

"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy,
not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

Socrates

Many families face are faced with the challenge of separation and divorce and whatever the cause it can be a hard time for everyone involved. It can be especially difficult to help a child manage their feelings while you're dealing with your own and although you can't protect a child from the hurt that follows, there are things you can do to help them come to terms with the inevitable changes that separation brings.

At Shefford Lower School we are committed to supporting both you and your child during this time and recognise that separation and divorce can evoke a wide range of emotions.

With that in mind I believe the process has to be led by the child. It can't be second guessed, planned for or have a particular time frame and the need for comfort and talking about your feelings cannot be pencilled in the diary. Support has to be available at the point of need. We acknowledge that sometimes two children from the same family might need completely different types of support. There is no one right way to feel.

As a school I believe we are incredibly good at supporting our children when they need it. We have many children, who for a diverse range of reasons, of which there is no hierarchy, are suffering trauma, and loss and we, as skilled staff manage and meet those needs daily. We do this by making sure it is child led. There is always someone available to listen when the need arises and in the large part, it is who the child has built a relationship with. The child usually chooses us and not the other way around.

We can all obviously continue to examine our procedures and learn and evolve as each new interaction or experience teaches us something new. We will however, be confident that the child will always be at the centre of all we do and that we all spend huge amounts of time thinking, talking and most importantly caring about what is best for the children in our care.

It is hoped that the information in this pack will help to support families and school staff so that they feel more confident in helping a child who is going through the separation of their parents. Please don't hesitate to contact school if we can offer any further support.

Julia Parry
Child and Family Support Worker

Useful contacts in school:

| | |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Polly Ross | Head Teacher |
| Julia Parry | Family Support Worker |
| Amber Cooper | Family Support Worker |

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|-----------|-------------------------|
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Let children know how life will change

Try to address major concerns for children such as:



- When and how they will see each parent. It can be helpful to have the same calendar in each home so that children can see exactly when they will be with each parent.

- Where they will live and will they still go to the same school.
- How they will spend time with important family members. Try to plan this in advance, especially times such as Christmas and Birthdays.
- How life will be different.

If children have questions you are not prepared to answer, let them know that you are both still working out the details. Reassure them that when you have an answer, they will be the first to know. Tell children they are not to blame, it is quite natural for children to feel responsible when parents split up. Make sure your children understand that your decision to divorce or separate had nothing to do with them or their behaviour. Additionally, children need to know that there is nothing they can do to change what is happening in the family. Also, reinforce the point that it is not their responsibility to try and make things better between you both. Make sure children know they can ask questions and talk about how they feel. Let children know you understand this will be a difficult change for them. They also need to hear that they will probably have many different feelings. Reassure them that it is okay to ask questions or talk to either parent.



If your children don't want to talk

The idea that life is changing can often be overwhelming for children. They may be reluctant to acknowledge the divorce or separation as real.

When children are having difficulty accepting the reality of divorce or separation they may:

- Change the subject when you talk about it.
- Choose not to tell others, such as friends, teachers or family members.
- Make up excuses for the change in the family.
- Talk about the family as if nothing has changed.
- Try to plan events that involve both parents being together.
- Resist spending time in the other home with their other parent because it makes the situation more real for them.

If your children don't want to talk, let them know you understand this is hard for them. Tell them you understand that they might not want to talk right now but when they are ready, you will be ready to listen.



Messages Children need to hear from parents

Below are some examples of things children need to hear:

- While the feelings we have for each other have changed, we will never stop loving you.
- We know this will be hard for you, and we are sorry.
- You can always love both parents.
- Just because we may be unhappy with each other, does not mean you have to be upset.
- What has happened is not your fault – you did not cause this.
- Divorce/separation is a grown-up problem that you cannot change.
- We will always be your parents.
- You will always have a family. Instead of being a family in one home, you will have a family in two homes.
- We will both continue to be a part of your life.



Possible reactions to separation/divorce

2-5 years-old

Reactions:

Behaving younger than they are.
Complaining of mysterious pains and being in distress.
Being aggressive, defiant, argumentative, and attention-seeking.
Being clingy, possessive.
Poor sleeping.
Blaming themselves and worrying about being abandoned or sent away.

How to help:

Try to make your child feel more secure by maintaining routines.
If you're the main carer, try not to be away for long periods.
Reassure your child that the split is nothing to do with anything they've done and that both their parents still love them.
Talk to nursery or school.

5-8 years-old

Reactions:

Feeling lost, rejected, guilty.
Feeling disloyal to the parent they aren't currently with.
Behaving younger than they are.
Crying.
Being sensible and appearing to cope well.
Thinking it's their fault.

How to help:

Explain the reasons for any changes to your child's life.
Avoid being angry.
Reassure them that they're loved, it's not their fault and that it's OK to be upset.
Talk to school.

9-12 years-old

Reactions:

Taking sides.
Crying.
Appearing to want to grow up too quickly or behaving like your parent, a replacement partner or another adult.

How to help:

Assure your child that you'll continue to care and look after them.

Be positive about the other parent.

Avoid arguing in front of them.

Encourage them to see friends.

Talk to school

Sometimes children have bad thoughts and feelings about themselves when their parents split up. They think that somehow, they must be to blame for their mum and dad's separation.

It's possible, for example, that your child believes that you and your ex separated because:

- They're unlovable
- They're too naughty
- They don't do enough at home
- They argue too much
- They aren't good enough at school

Your child may not be able to express these feelings in so many words. They may not even be aware they have them. However, the feelings can come out in different ways.

Personal history time line

One common feeling children experience after a separation or divorce is worry about the future. They may be concerned about what is going to happen to them and if their lives will ever be normal again. Creating a time line can help children put the current events of their lives in perspective. It can help them see that they have experienced many good things in the past, and that they have many years ahead of them to have fun and happy times with their families.

Younger children will need help with this activity but will enjoy thinking of events for their parent to put on their time line. Discuss your child's time line with them when it is finished. Point out that they have experienced many different events throughout life, some good and some bad. Help them to understand that they can get through the difficult time of separation/divorce and that there is happiness and good times ahead.

- Draw a long horizontal line on a sheet of paper
- Label your birth at one end with a star.
- Label the present time somewhere in the middle.
- Mark significant events that have occurred in your life between the "birth" star and the "present" mark. Possible ideas include births of siblings, getting pets, starting school, moving, learning to read, learning to ride a bike, divorce, remarriage, joining a team or club, death of relatives and special holidays.
- Mark events that you hope will happen in the future

Time capsule

Making a time capsule is another way of helping children recognise that the



troublesome feelings surrounding the separation/divorce won't last forever and that there are many things to look forward to in the future. Have your child put things in the capsule that represent their life: stories, drawings, photographs, and other special treasures and reminders. Encourage your child to answer the following questions and put them in the time capsule:

- Who are your friends?
 - Who is part of your family now?
 - Who will be part of your family in the future?
 - Where will you be living in one year? Five years?
 - What kinds of things do you like to do?
 - What would you like to learn how to do in the future?
 - What do you want to be when you grow up?
- There are many different kinds of containers that make good time capsules — large glass jars with tight lids, large manila envelopes, shoe boxes, or drawstring bags. After your child has finished making the time capsule, help them to seal it. Let them decide when it will be opened. For example, it might be opened in one year, on a certain birthday, or five years from the separation/divorce. When the time comes to open the capsule, your child will undoubtedly have fun looking at the things they have put in it, noticing how their handwriting has changed, and reading the things they wrote.

Let's exercise!

Engaging in physical activities together helps parents and children spend time with one another. Exercising is a good way to get rid of tension or angry feelings in a positive way. Good activities for parents and children to enjoy together • Swimming • Biking • Hiking • Walking • Camping • Flying kites • Roller blading.



Worry box

A worry box can help your child to get rid of their worries.

- Use a shoe box, a jar, envelope, Tupperware container, or make a box. Some children find it helpful to decorate it and make it into their own.
- Keep a pad of paper, pencil and a box near their bed.
- Encourage them to write down their worries, or write them for them.
- Put them in the box where they can't bother them anymore.
- Keep the worry box in a safe place outside their room. (Some children find it helpful to throw the worries out).
- Encourage your child to talk to you about the worries in their box.



Useful Books

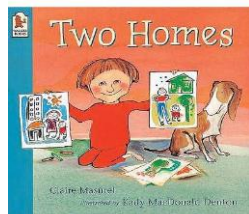
This is a selection of books available that explore the subject of separation and divorce. It is by no means extensive and when choosing a book about such a sensitive and personal subject you should be guided by your own feelings and beliefs.

The Invisible String. By Patrice Karst



This book is appropriate in any situation where a child is separated from a loved one (death, a deployment, school separation, children being shuttled back and forth to divorced parents, etc.). The premise of this book is, "People who love each other are always connected by a very special String made of love." The string can reach anyone, anywhere...even loved ones in Heaven! The String can't go away, even when you're angry or upset.

Two Homes. By Claire Masurel



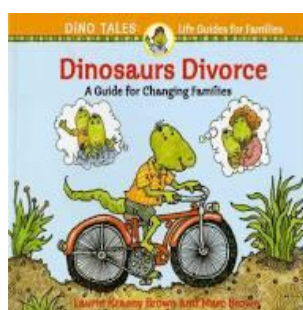
Alex has two homes - a home where Daddy lives and a home where Mummy lives. Alex has two front doors, two bedrooms and two different chairs, but whether Alex is with Mummy or Daddy, one thing stays the same, Alex is loved by them both - always

The Huge Bag of Worries. By Virginia Ironside



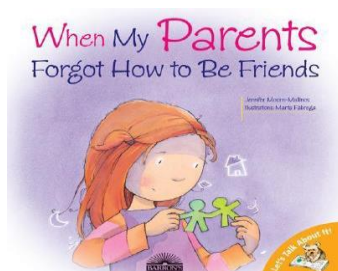
Wherever Jenny goes, her worries follow her - in a big blue bag! They are there when she goes swimming, when she watches TV, and even when she is in the lavatory. Jenny decides they will have to go. But who can she get to help her?

Dinosaurs Divorce. By Laurene Krasny Brown



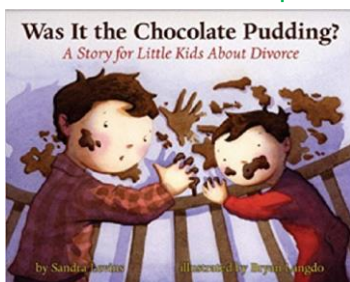
Dinosaurs Divorce Will Help you Understand: * Divorce Words and What They Mean * Why Parents Divorce * What About You? * After the Divorce * Living with One Parent * Visiting Your Parent * Having Two Homes * Celebrating Holidays and Special Occasions * Telling Your Friends * Meeting Parents' New Friends * Living with Stepparents * Having Stepsisters and Stepbrothers.

When My Parents Forgot to be friends. By Jennifer Moore-Mallinos, Marta Fàbrega



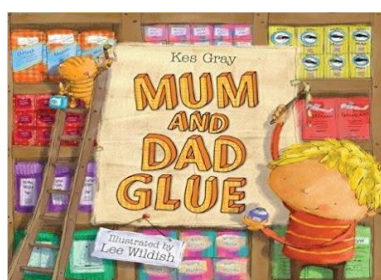
Youngsters become confused and hurt when their parents constantly argue, then decide to divorce. This sensitively written book assures boys and girls that children are in no way responsible for their parent's inability to get along together.

Was it the chocolate pudding? By Sandra Levins and Brian Langdo



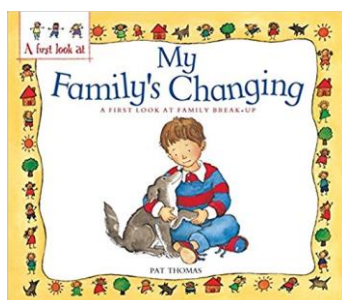
A story for little children about divorce. With childlike innocence and humour, this book explains divorce from a child's point of view. Special emphasis is placed on the fact that divorce is not the child's fault, that it is a grown-up problem. Deals with practical day-to-day matters such as single-family homes, shared care, child-care issues, and misunderstandings.

Mum and Dad Glue. By Kes Gray and Lee Wildish



A little boy tries to find a pot of parent glue to stick his mum and dad back together. His parents have come undone and he wants to mend their marriage, stick their smiles back on and make them better. This rhyming story is brilliantly told with a powerful message that even though his parents may be broken, their love for him is not.

My Family's Changing. By Pat Thomas



A beautifully illustrated picture book to support children through divorce or separation. The fears, worries and questions surrounding this difficult experience are made accessible and approachable. Notes for parents and teachers at the back of the book provide valuable advice for how to share this book with your child or class

Useful websites

Relate

www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-separation-and-divorce

Family Lives

www.familylives.org.uk/advice/divorce-and-separation

Gingerbread

www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/separation-advice/support-for-your-child

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/separation-divorce-and-contact

www.gov.uk/separation-divorce

Gov UK

www.advicecentral.org.uk
Central for Central Bedfordshire

Advice